UNITED NATIONS

HSP

HSP/GC/25/2/Add.3

UN-HABITAT Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme

Distr.: General
6 February 2015

Original: English

Twenty-fifth session
Nairobi, 17–23 April 2015
Item 5 of the provisional agenda*

Activities of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, including coordination matters

Activities of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme

United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III)

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to Governing Council resolution 24/14, in which the Council requested the Secretary-General of the Conference, in his capacity as Executive Director, to submit to the Governing Council at its twenty-fifth session a report on the implementation of the resolution, including an update on progress made in the preparations for the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III).

The outcome of the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the Conference, held in New York on 17 and 18 September 2014, as well as General Assembly resolution 69/226 are also considered in the report.

Since its election in September 2014, the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee has been making progress in the preparations for the sessions of the Preparatory Committee as well as for other key aspects of the preparatory process for Habitat III. The second session of the Preparatory Committee will be held in Nairobi from 14 to 16 April 2015.

* HSP/GC/25/1.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 66/207, the General Assembly decided to convene, in 2016, in line with the bi-decennial cycle (1976, 1996 and 2016), the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable urbanization that should focus on the implementation of a "New Urban Agenda", and emphasized that the Conference and the preparatory process should be carried out in the most inclusive, efficient, effective and improved manner.

2. In resolution 67/216, the General Assembly established a preparatory committee to carry out the preparations for the Conference, and decided that it would meet three times before the opening of the Conference with the first meeting being held in New York for two days during the sixty-ninth session of the Assembly, the second being held in Nairobi in 2015 for three days, taking full advantage of the twenty-fifth session of the Governing Council of UN-Habitat.

3. In resolution 69/226, the General Assembly welcomed the offer by the Government of Ecuador to host Habitat III, and decided that the Conference would be held in Quito during the week of 17 October 2016. It also decided that the third session of the Preparatory Committee would be held in Indonesia in July 2016.

4. Habitat III will be one of the first global United Nations conferences to focus on the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda, scheduled to be adopted in September 2015.

5. The present report provides information on the implementation of Governing Council resolution 24/14, including an update on progress made in the preparations for the Conference, as requested in paragraph 18 of the resolution.

6. In his report on progress to date in the implementation of the outcomes of the second United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat II) and identification of new and emerging challenges on sustainable urban development (A/CONF.226/PC.1/5), submitted to the Preparatory Committee for the Conference at its first session, held in New York on 17 and 18 September 2014, the Secretary-General noted that urbanization had brought growth and development, including a dramatic reduction in poverty; increased national economic growth; major progress in human settlements connectivity, which helped boost productivity and the creation of opportunities; the merging of cities and towns into new regional spatial configurations that were conducive to faster economic and demographic growth; and a higher degree of interdependence between rural and urban areas that had helped reduce the vulnerability of rural communities and enhance the prospects of more equitable development.

7. However, urbanization had been unable to respond to many existing and emerging challenges such as urban sprawl, congestion, pollution, emission of greenhouse gases, emerging urban poverty, segregation, increasing inequalities and other negative externalities. All those phenomena were associated with a model of urbanization that was not sustainable. The report described how a renewed political commitment to sustainable urban development could harness the positive role of urbanization in driving growth and sustainability, and address the challenges and reduce the negative externalities. The report built on the draft Habitat III "think piece" prepared by UN-Habitat, presented to the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UN-Habitat and distributed to other United Nations system organizations for comments and further inputs, as requested by the Governing Council in resolution 24/14. It concluded that the implementation of a new urban agenda, identified by the General Assembly as the intended result of the Conference, would range across the entire process of urbanization that was sweeping across the global community, encompassing all human settlements in all parts of the world. The aim of the New Urban Agenda was not only to make slums history and address long-standing issues of economic depression and social marginalization, but also to tackle urban poverty and inequity and new forms of discrimination.

8. Good governance and the rule of law at the national and subnational levels are essential for the achievement of those objectives, in order to move all together to a more sustainable model of urbanization. If urbanization is to be truly inclusive and sustainable, participatory mechanisms and integrated human settlements planning and management practices are crucial.

9. The New Urban Agenda will combine the concept and the practice of sustainable urbanization. This could unlock a dynamic that has not yet been harnessed on a consistent basis, and which will be essential to achieve the ambitious targets of the sustainable development agenda. Under the New Urban Agenda, a set of parameters could be developed that would have wide application and be a major force for positive change. If successful, it could drive sustainable development globally and, in

the field of urbanization and human settlements, allow important opportunities to be seized that would help to ensure that cities and towns are more productive, happier and more cohesive.

10. Also at the first session of the Preparatory Committee, the Secretary-General of the Conference submitted a report on preparations for the Conference (A/CONF.226/PC.1/4). The report described the activities carried out at the national, regional and global levels in 2013 and up to September 2014 and provided further information on the activities proposed for the period from 2014 to 2016 in the areas of knowledge, engagement, policy and operations, taking due account of the provisions of Governing Council resolution 24/14.

II. Preparatory processes for Habitat III

A. National-level process

11. At the twenty-fourth session of the Governing Council, the Secretary-General of the Conference, in his capacity as Executive Director of UN-Habitat, encouraged every Member State of the United Nations to prepare, as part of the documentation for the preparatory process of the Conference, a national, evidence-based progress report on the implementation of the 1996 Habitat Agenda and other internationally agreed goals and targets relevant to housing and sustainable urban development (HSP/GC/24/2/Add.3, para. 28). In paragraph 4 of resolution 24/14, the Governing Council invited member States to prepare, before the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee, national reports which would consider the implementation of the Habitat II agenda and of other internationally agreed goals and targets, as well as new challenges, emerging trends and a prospective vision for sustainable human settlements and urban development, as a basis for the formulation of a new urban agenda, in line with paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 67/216.

12. In paragraph 3 of resolution 24/14, the Government Council called upon member States to form or strengthen national habitat committees to ensure their effective and efficient participation in the Habitat II preparatory process, including the preparation of national reports. National habitat committees should be fully inclusive of representatives from government, civil society, the private sector, academic and research institutions and all other relevant stakeholders. National habitat committees could also include country-level representatives of United Nations system organizations, the Bretton Woods institutions, regional development banks and donors.

13. In response to the request contained in paragraph 2 (d) of resolution 24/14, suggested guidelines and a format for the preparation of national reports were shared with member States in February 2014. These guidelines, together with an earlier guide on the establishment or strengthening of national habitat committees, were distributed to all Governments in January 2013, which enabled the preparation of Habitat III national reports to begin.

14. National reviews to provide input to the reports should cover trends, achievements and remaining gaps and challenges. While countries were free to determine the processes they considered most appropriate for the preparation of their Habitat III national reports, the use of national habitat committees for the preparation of national reports was strongly encouraged. Member States were also encouraged to collaborate with civil society actors and other relevant stakeholders, in particular local authorities, at all levels of preparation of the review so as to benefit from their experience and expertise.

15. While they are not mandatory, the submission of national reports is strongly encouraged, in order to allow the Secretary-General of the Conference, in cooperation with the United Nations regional commissions and other relevant international, regional and subregional organizations, to prepare the Habitat III regional reports drawing on the national reports, as directed. Specific support has been given to least developed countries to facilitate the preparation of their national inputs to Habitat III.[1] National reports submitted by member States in 1996 have also been published (unhabitat.org/member-states/) to facilitate the drafting of the new reports.

16. Also at its twenty-fourth session, the Governing Council invited member States to work through national urban forums – multi-stakeholder platforms to support sustainable urban development processes and debates at the country level – in their preparations for Habitat III (resolution 24/5). National urban forums have been organized, in particular in Africa (Cameroon, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Senegal, among others). Some of the national urban forums have included local, regional and national consultations, workshops and other capacity-building and advocacy activities. In paragraph 8 of

[1] Information on the status of national habitat committees and national reports for Habitat III is available from: http://unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/National-reports_23-Sept-2014-ABM-WEBSITE-COPY.pdf.

resolution 24/14, the Governing Council called upon the Secretary-General to provide support to member States, including through their national habitat committees and national urban forums, to elaborate the national reports.

B. Regional-level process

17. In paragraph 5 of resolution 24/14, the Governing Council requested the Secretary-General of the Conference to prepare regional reports drawing on the national reports. To this end, and following the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 67/216, effective contributions from and the active participation of the regional commissions in the Habitat III process has been encouraged. The regional processes - which involve the preparation of the regional reports, the organization of regional intergovernmental meetings and other regional events - have been undertaken in all five regions and have been coordinated by the Habitat III secretariat in collaboration with the regional commissions and the UN-Habitat regional offices.

18. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 66/207, in which the Assembly encouraged the holding of regular regional ministerial conferences on housing and urban development and other relevant expert group meetings to support the activities of the preparatory process, during 2013 and 2014 several regions organized high-level events in support of preparations for Habitat III.

19. The fifth session of the African Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development, held in N'Djamena from 25 to 28 February 2014, included on its agenda a discussion that linked the Habitat III preparatory process and the post-2015 development agenda. The theme of the session was "Case studies in financing human settlements in Africa: appropriate legislative frameworks and innovations in implementation". The main outcomes of the session were the N'Djamena Declaration and the N'Djamena Action Plan. These documents stated the key priorities of Africa in the area of cities and other human settlements and proposed actions for their achievement in accordance with the work on articulating an urban agenda for Africa, the Habitat III preparatory process and the post-2015 development agenda.

20. The fifth session of the Asian Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development was held in Seoul from 3 to 5 November 2014 with the theme "Equal opportunity for sustainable development". The ministers adopted the Seoul Declaration, in which, among other things, they emphasized the linkage between sustainable urbanization and sustainable development, agreement on the urban sustainable development goal and the formulation of the New Urban Agenda at Habitat III, and decided to deepen their commitment to collaboration and cooperation in the region to make cities and human settlements integrated, inclusive, sustainable and resilient. The ministers also decided to develop and implement innovative national policies promoting inclusiveness and equity in urban planning, urban development and infrastructure expansion, leading to equal opportunities for prosperity based on merit.

21. Habitat III was also discussed at the twenty-second General Assembly of the Ministers and High-level Authorities of the Housing and Urban Development Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Santiago from 30 September to 2 October 2013, with representation from 13 Governments. The main outcome document was the Santiago Declaration, in which the participants expressed their desire to actively engage in the preparatory process of Habitat III, as well as in the Conference itself.

22. In the European region, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) hosted the Ministerial Meeting on Housing and Land Management in October 2013, at which the ministers adopted the Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management in the ECE region for the period 2014–2020. The Strategy contains specific targets to be reached by member States by 2020. It aims to contribute to Habitat III, focusing on the global commitment to sustainable cities while continuing to support the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The seventy-fifth session of the ECE Committee on Housing and Land Management took place in October 2014. The Committee approved the Geneva United Nations Charter on Sustainable Housing to improve the sustainability of housing in the ECE region through effective policies and actions at all levels, supported by international cooperation.

C. Global process and engagement

23. A global report drawing on the national and regional reports, and also on available knowledge, resources and data, as an input to and support for the preparatory process of the Conference, as requested in paragraph 6 of resolution 24/14, has been included in the global road map 2014–2016 for Habitat III.

24. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 66/207 and paragraph 7 of Governing Council resolution 24/14, the seventh session of the World Urban Forum, held in Medellin, Colombia, from 5 to 11 April 2014, provided an important contribution to the preparatory process by holding focused sessions and discussions on the Conference. With the theme "Urban equity in development: cities for life", the Forum was attended by more than 22,000 people from 142 countries, with the purpose of improving collective knowledge, advancing cooperation and coordination and raising awareness on sustainable urban development.

25. At the Forum, Habitat III was recognized as a unique opportunity to develop a new urban agenda that could contribute to harnessing urbanization as a positive force for present and future generations and to advance the quest for equity and shared prosperity. Participants acknowledged that the deep structural problems and challenges of cities could be better addressed when equity was an integral part of the development agenda and that equity was both a moral obligation and a central element of social justice, and could become an agent of transformative change.

26. Participants highlighted the need to promote a new urban agenda that could overcome the challenge of lack of adequate legal frameworks and planning, which lead to the relentless expansion of cities, intensive energy use, alarming and dangerous impacts of climate change, multiple forms of inequality and exclusion and increased difficulties in providing decent work for all.

27. In paragraph 9 of resolution 24/14, the Governing Council called upon the Secretary-General of the Conference to continue engaging all Habitat Agenda partners and new partners in the World Urban Campaign in order to identify and collect good practices that could contribute to the new urban agenda.

28. Since its launch in March 2010 at the fifth session of the World Urban Forum, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the World Urban Campaign has evolved from a knowledge-sharing network into a think tank, and has been considerably strengthened in terms of legitimacy and the number of partners engaged.

29. In October 2014, the World Urban Campaign organized the first Urban Thinkers Campus in Caserta, Italy. Building on the previous deliberations of the World Urban Campaign, this event attracted new thinking and strengthened the theme of the first Campaign, "The future we want - The city we need", which was launched in March 2014 in New York prior to the seventh session of the World Urban Forum. The Urban Thinkers Campus was acknowledged by participants to be a model for pursuing debates and bringing partners to the table to discuss principles, policies and action plans on key issues for the Habitat III conference and the New Urban Agenda. Participants approved the creation of a global partners deliberative platform for the Conference, named the General Assembly of Partners (GAP), that would enable partners to deliberate, build a common platform and participate effectively in the Conference. GAP would be an innovative process, building on the legacy of the Habitat II conference.

30. One of the main legacies of Habitat II is the need for participation of and partnership with local authorities, civil society and grass-roots communities, the private sector, academia and researchers, parliamentarians, professional organizations, and children's, youth and women's groups, with a view to achieving sustainable urban development.

31. In resolution 69/226, the General Assembly decided that major groups and the non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, as well as those accredited to Habitat II and the summit to be held in September 2015 for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, shall register in order to participate in the Conference. It also decided that non-governmental organizations not in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council wishing to attend and contribute to the Conference, and whose work was relevant to the subject of the Conference, may participate as observers in the Conference, as well as in the preparatory meetings, in accordance with the provisions contained in part VII of Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996, and subject to the approval of the Preparatory Committee in plenary meeting, and that, while respecting fully the provisions contained in rule 57 of the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Council, such a decision should be made by consensus.

32. To ensure the most inclusive and participatory process towards Habitat III and in the discussions on the New Urban Agenda, in addition to stakeholders, the views of all citizens on urban priorities should be captured and inform the views of member States. In this regard, several innovative tools are being analysed, building on the experiences of the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and the post-2015 development agenda.

United Nations system

33. In paragraph 9 of resolution 68/239, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General of the Conference to mobilize the expertise of the United Nations system as a whole, including the regional commissions, and of other relevant international, regional and subregional organizations, for the Habitat III preparatory process.

34. In paragraph 11 of resolution 24/14, the Governing Council invited the Secretary-General of the Conference to consider establishing an effective United Nations system-wide coordination mechanism so as to enable the effective participation and specialized agencies, and the international financial institutions, at all stages of the preparatory process at the Conference itself.

35. On the margins of the high-level segment of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, held in Geneva from 1 to 4 July 2013, an agreement was made to establish a United Nations inter-agency coordinating committee for Habitat III. Other preparatory meetings were held in New York on 27 November 2013 and in Medellin, Colombia, on 8 April 2014 during the seventh session of the World Urban Forum.

36. An open consultation took place during the first session of the Preparatory Committee in September 2014 in New York.

37. The twenty-seventh session of the High-level Committee on Programmes of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, held in Santiago on 17 and 18 March 2014, had on its agenda an item on a new United Nations urban agenda. Representatives of 17 organizations of the United Nations system spoke in support of creating an ad hoc, time-bound working group to deepen the understanding among the organizations of the system of the key drivers of a new urban agenda and strengthen system-wide coherence and coordination on sustainable urbanization. The working group aimed to develop a coherent system-wide input to the conference in the form of a policy paper on the theme of "Urbanization and sustainable development: towards a new United Nations urban agenda" (see CEB/2014/4).

38. The United Nations task team on Habitat III, comprised of the focal points of several United Nations agencies and programmes, will coordinate system-wide preparations towards Habitat III and will benefit from ongoing processes and existing platforms, especially those related to the post-2015 development agenda. The first meeting of the task team took place in January 2015.

D. Habitat III trust fund

39. Financial resources related to preparations for Habitat III comes from both the United Nations regular budget and extrabudgetary sources. The costs related to hosting the Conference and the third session of the Preparatory Committee will be borne by the respective host countries.

40. In paragraph 13 of resolution 67/216, the General Assembly decided to establish a trust fund for Habitat III. It urged international and bilateral donors as well as the private sector, financial institutions, foundations and other donors to support the preparations for the Conference through voluntary contributions to the trust fund.

41. The Habitat III trust fund is operational and administered in conformity with the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations (ST/SGB/2013/4), and the procedures defined in the administrative instruction on general trust funds (ST/AI/284).

42. By its resolution 68/248 A, the General Assembly approved the resources proposed in the amount of $3,136,700 for the preparatory process of Habitat III, including $1,063,000 for conference servicing (under section 2, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and conference management) and $2,073,700 for non-recurrent resources (under section 15, human settlements) of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2014–2015.

43. As a result of an oral statement made at the time of the adoption of resolution 69/226, proposed regular budget implications were included in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2016–2017.

44. To date, Habitat III has resources received and confirmed of $5.7 million ($2.1 million from the regular budget for the biennium 2014–2015, $1.1 million from the budget for Conference Services and $2.5 million in extrabudgetary resources).

45. In line with paragraph 15 of Governing Council resolution 24/14 and paragraph 12 of General Assembly resolution 69/226, Member States and international and bilateral donors, as well as the private sector, financial institutions and foundations and other donors in a position to do so are encouraged to continue to support the national, regional and global preparations for Habitat III through

voluntary contributions to the Habitat III trust fund and to support the participation of representatives of developing countries in the forthcoming Preparatory Committee meetings and in the Conference itself in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 13 (c) of resolution 67/216. Voluntary contributions are invited to support the participation of Habitat Agenda partners and other relevant stakeholders in the Preparatory Committee meetings.

III. Conclusion

46. Since the adoption of resolution 24/14 in April 2013, preparations for Habitat III have progressed and relevant decisions have been taken by the General Assembly to provide a solid framework for achieving the objectives of the Conference.

47. A road map for preparations for Habitat III in terms of knowledge, policy, engagement and operations has been established at the local, national, regional and global levels.

48. Urbanization is recognized as a driving force as well as a source of development that has the power to change and improve lives. It is expected that Habitat III will play an important role in making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.